

THE
Church of *England*

The Sole Encourager of

FREE-THINKING.

OR, AN

ESSAY,

To prove

That the CHURCH of ENGLAND
has this Mark of a *true Church*, that she
allows and encourages every particular
Member in her Communion, to examine
and try her *Doctrine and Discipline*; and to
compare them with *Scripture*, and the
Pattern of the Primitive Church; and that
this Liberty is not allow'd by any other
Churches or Sects in the World, which set
up for her *Rivals and Adversaries*.

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good, 1 Thes. v. 21.

NOTTINGHAM:

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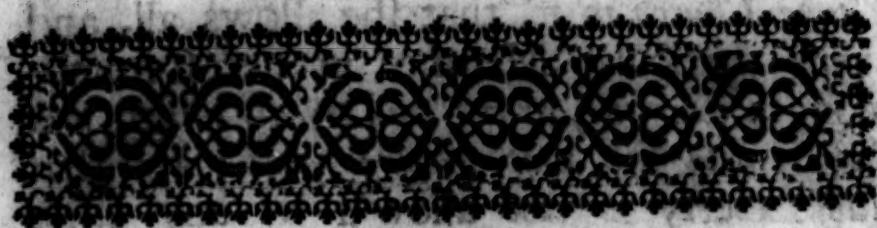
ESSAY

To prove

That the CHURCH of ENGLAND
has not Mark of a true Church; that the
allowance and erection of any particular
Member in her Communion to examine
and try her Doctrine and Discipline; and to
separate them who are not of the same
Persuasion of the Primæval Church; and that
this Liberty is not allowed by any other
Church or State in the World; which let
up for her Rights and Privileges.

Printed by W. Wood, at the Sign of the Sun, in St. Pauls Church-Yard; and by J. O. at the Sign of the Sun, in St. Pauls Church-Yard.

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T H E
Church of *England*

The Sole Encourager of
Free-Thinking, &c.

ST. Basil advises, that *Christians should try the Things spoken by their Teachers,* and receive thole Doctrines which are agreeable to, and reject thole which are alien from the *Scriptures*; because, says he, St. Paul hath said, *Try all things; hold fast that which is good.*

My Design in this *Essay*, is not to enquire into, examine and try the several Doctrines and Opinions, that are taught or embrac'd by the several *Parties and Sects*, that divide the *Christian World*; for that would be both an *endless*, and in some respects, an *unprofitable Task*. But, what I intend is, to shew,

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that

that the Church of England has this mark of a true Church in it, that she allows all, and every particular Member in her Communion, to examine, prove and try all things, and then to hold fast that which is good; and that this Liberty is not allow'd by any other Church or Sect in the World, which set up for Her Rivals and Adversaries.

The reason of my undertaking to treat upon this Subject is, because that the Atheists, Deists, Libertines and Free-thinkers, such as Hobbs, Lock, Spinoza, Milton, Toland, Tindal, and the like, do frequently in their Conversations and Books, caution the People, to beware of being blinded by the Church or Clergy; they call upon them, to judge and believe and reason for themselves, to shake off the Tyranny of Creeds and Articles, and throw off the Yokes, that Synods and Councils have put upon their Understandings.

Now, in order to oppose the wicked Design of these Adversaries of Religion, I will endeavour to prove what I before asserted, that the Church of England allows and encourages every particular Member in her Communion to examine, prove and try all things, and then hold fast that which is good; Which is one mark of a true Church, which no other Churches or Sects in the World, which set up for her Adversaries, can pretend to.

And

And I doubt not, but in treating upon this Subject, I shall be able to give so many, and undeniable Instances of the Indulgence of our *Church* in this Affair, as will convince, (but perhaps not reform) those, who make the want of this *Liberty*, a pretence of their *ir-reconcilable aversion* to it.

1st, Then, the Education of our *Youth*, is for the most part entrusted with our *Clergy*; so that here the Foundation is laid for the *freedom of trying and examining all things*. It is very true, that pursuant to the *Baptismal vow*, our Children are taught the Principles of the *Christian Religion*, and so trained by degrees to the *Doctrines of the Church*. And this is most reasonable: Every Master teaches that to another, which himself believes is the *Truth*; if he did not, he would be a Deceiver, and betray his trust. But then our *Youth* are brought up to all those *Arts and Sciences*, which serve to clear their *Minds* from *Prejudices*, to establish in them the true Method of *fair Reasoning*, and all the nice Arts of discerning between *Truth and Fals-hood*: Nothing is neglected, that may make them, (when they come to the use of their Reason) free in their *Enquiries*, and impartial in their *Sentiments*. *Grammar* and *Logick*, *Languages* and *Mathematicks*, and every *Art*, that improves the Powers of Nature to think and discern aright, are taught in

Great Britain; and understood by our *Clergy*, in as much Perfection, as in any the Politest Parts of *Europe*. This Order has afforded us Eminent *Professors* in all those *Arts*; and *Authors* that have contributed as much as any of the most admired *Foreigners*, to their Advancement and Improvement.

In our *Universities*, not onely all those Principles of Reason and Nature, that support Religion, but even the Fundamentals of our Faith, are publicly exposed to Question, freely debated, and argued against every day, as if they had never been tryed or discussed before: so that in the Article of Education, nothing is wanting on the part of our *Clergy*, to train up every Person in the best way imaginable, for the pursuit and attainment of Truth.

2dly, The holy *Scriptures*, which are the Rule of our Faith in Matters of Religion, are freely communicated to our *Laity* in their own Mother-Tongue; so freely, that there is nothing which our *Clergy* do so much recommend, as the serious study and frequent perusal of 'em: These holy *Scriptures* are also communicated in such order, and with so condescending a regard to weak Memories, that the meanest may not be depriv'd the benefit of them. Some part of these is read every day in the Service of the Church to our People; and a Portion of them made the constant Subject of all that mighty Labour
of

of *Preaching*, which is amongst us. It would be endless to enumerate the many *Volumes* that have been written, to explain these *Oracles of God*, to make them intelligible to the lowest Capacities, and prove them to be of divine Authority, against the Objections and Cavils of the most subtle and learned *Hereticks*. So that nothing has been neglected by our *Church*, to set before every Member of it, and to explain to him, that *Rule*, which is to be the measure of his *Faith* and *Knowledge* in matters of Religion.

3dly, The *Writings of the Primitive Fathers*, the *Councils*, *Church-Records*, and *Historians*, make up that Pattern which sets before us the true Image of the first *Pure, Christian, Apostolical Church*, before it was corrupted with *Errors and Heresies* : By which we may see when our own *Church* is like it ; when Spotless and Beautiful, and when it degenerates and varies from the *Original*.

And here the Industry of our *Clergy* is never enough to be commended, who have taken all imaginable care, to preserve these *Evidences*, to compare and reconcile them ; to vindicate them against the *Exceptions of captious and sceptical Writers*, and to put the most useful *Parts of them into English*, for the benefit of the meanest *Readers*. So that nothing is wanting on our Parts, to let every Member of our *Church* see, what his Pattern is, what the
pure

pure Primitive Church was, whereby they may freely compare it with their own.

4thly, All the *Doctrines, Articles, Canons,* and *Discipline* of our Church, in short, *all things that are required as Terms of Communion,* are fully and freely communicated and publish'd: Nothing is kept in reserve: But every the meanest Member sees, and reads, and may consider, what he is to Believe, to Acknowledge, and to Practice, in order to join himself to the Church of England. He has all and every part of the Terms opened and explained to him; so that he cannot easily mistake them. The reasonableness of every *Article*, the Conformity between the *Doctrines* and the *Scriptures*, between the *Discipline* of Ours and the *Primitive Church*, so fully made out, that no Member of our Church takes any thing implicitly, or upon trust, but becomes a Member of the Church of England, with his Eyes broad open, and knows exactly, what is requir'd of him, when he makes his choice.

But 5thly, As every Member of our Church may exercise his Judgment impartially, in examining the *Terms of Communion* which our Church enjoyns; so she takes care to let them know, what she rejects and refuses at the same time. Whatever either the *Deist, Socinian, Papist, Presbyterian,* or any other Church, or Congregation can say for themselves,

selves, is freely told and publish'd in *England*. Our *Clergy* not onely permit, but enquire and search for, and communicate the several *Accounts*, relating to the *Faith* and *State of Foreign Churches*. They are freely heard amongst us, and the best of their *Books* are translated into our *Mother-Tongue*: The *Clergy* all the while encouraging this sort of *Learning*, by disputing publickly with them, and thereby urging them to disclose their *Principles*, the *Secrets of their Church*, and the *Arguments* by which they defend it. So that every *Member of our Church* has ample *Liberty and Opportunity* to know, not onely his *own Church*, and her *Doctrines and Discipline*, but the *Doctrines and Discipline* of all other *Churches* in the *World*; whereby he may compare them together freely, and see the difference between them.

The freedom of *Controversy*, was never greater than in the *Church of England*: The *Press* is open; *Conversation* almost unlimited; and every one *Speaks, Writes, and Prints* his *Sentiments*, without disturbance.

If a thorough *Examination*, a vigorous *Opposition*, and the most severe *Trial*, that ever any *Church* underwent, from all *Ranks and Orders of Men*, are enough to establish the *Church of England*, she must be immoveable. Not an *Article*, not a *Ceremony*, but has been question'd, debated, and largely and learnedly

ly defended by her *Clergy*; and at one time or other, her whole *Constitution, Doctrine and Discipline* have pass'd the utmost *Enquiries*, and stood the last *shock of Dispute*. It is indeed to be lamented, that we have such a Licentiousness of the *Press*, and such Excesses of *Wrangle*; when Men will be *Witty*, instead of being *learned* upon *Religion*; when they *Rail, or Cant, or Cavil*, instead of proposing a reasonable *Doubt or Objection*; when they persist and squabble for the last Word, or when they onely dispute over the already answer'd and condemn'd *Notions* of the *Hereticks* and *Gainsayers of Antiquity*: In these *Cases*, the *Church* does complain, and very justly calls this, *Liberty abused*, and wou'd interpose and exert her *Authority*. For she has an *Authority*, (tho' not an *Authority* to erect an *Inquisition*) and yet some are apt to distinguish even the lowest degree of *Authority* by that Name. However, we may challenge the *Adversaries* of our *Church* to shew us any one considerable *Author* of any *Sect or Religion* whatever, who has by any the least pretence to *Reason*; attack'd any the smallest *Article or Ceremony* of our *Church*, but our *Clergy* have fully answer'd all those *Objections*, and have condescended to take Notice even of *Enthusiasts, Railers, Canters*, and such *despicable Writers*, as might justly have been neglected; were not the Weak to be humoured,

mour'd, and even the *Foot* to be answer'd, lest he should be wise in his own conceit. It must therefore be acknowledg'd, that no Man is debarr'd of his just Priviledges by the Church of *England*, nor depriv'd of the due freedom of *Conscience*.

Sixthly, There can be no better Proof of a Church encouraging a free and impartial Enquiry after Truth, than when upon full Evidence and Conviction, she rectifies a Mistake, tho' of long continuance, reforms her self, and lays aside her Corruptions: Now our Church of *England* has given this Proof of her Sincerity. In the days of *Poperie*, she made several strong Efforts to throw off that intollerable Yoke; some of the *Romish* Absurdities she shook off long before the Reformation, and was not altogether so corrupt, as the more bigotted Nations of *Europe*: At the Reformation she separated intirely, and purged her self from the Dross and Superstition of her former Faith. By this Rent from the Church of *Rome*, she again joined her self to the pure Primitive Church of the *Cyprianick* Age; but not long after was deluded and debaied, over-run with grievous Errors, her Discipline and Ceremonies trod under foot, and the whole Constitution lost in Parties, Sub-divisions, and an universal Desolation and Confusion: After this, upon the recovery of a better Mind, she reviv'd once more, washed her self clean, and returned

to her *Primitive Innocence*. Thus, the *Church of England*, by *reforming* so often already, has given sufficient *Proofs* that she will do so again, whenever she is convinc'd of being in the wrong; and therefore she calls upon all her *Members* to exert the utmost of their *Judgment* and *Learning*, to show her, when she *Errs*, and thereby to contribute towards making her as *pure* as 'tis possible for her to be, in a *State of Trial* and *Frailty*. And this is another remarkable *Instance*, how great a respect the *Church of England* has for the *Trial* and *Examination* of all things.

7thly, There are several of the *first and divine Rights* of our *Church*, in the exercise of which great regard is had to the *Examination* and *Trial* of private *Persons*. Thus, in the *Ordination* of *Bishops*, *Priests*, and *Deacons*, the *People* are call'd upon to object against the *Persons* propos'd, and to join their *Testimony* to the *Decree* of the *Church*, in conferring those *Dignities*. So, again, in the *Ceremony* of *Marriage*, the *People* are at *Liberty* to declare every thing which they know to be an *impediment* in the *Parties*; and at the *Holy Communion* of the *Lord's Supper*, if they are scandaliz'd at the presence of any *notorious Offender*, they may publicly demand to have him repell'd, and rejected, if his *Crime* be such as he persists in, and such as the *Church* has adjudg'd to deserve that *Punishment*. So great a regard

has our Church for the Trial and Examination of all things, that you see she will not exercise any of her most important and uncontested Rights, without the Concurrence, Assistance, and Approbation of all her Members.

To conclude, It has been the Glory of the Church of England, to have many other Churches, differing from her in Doctrine, and Worship, Witnesses of her Reputation, and Proclaimers of her Praises; more perhaps, than any one National Church beside can boast of, so that she stands fairest for the Title of Universal, if the Universal Church were to be chosen by the Votes of all the National Churches: A Right that the Church of Rome has often pleaded for in this case. Now these Praises of our Church are owing to her Clemency and good Opinion of others: She does not deny Salvation to every Comunion but her own; and therefore when any private Member quits her, she does not presently pronounce him damned, but is willing to believe, that he is persuaded he is in the right; and therefore pursues him with fresh Arguments, endeavours to recal him, and upon his Conviction, makes his Admission easy, and the Terms moderate: And this Treatment of Deserters by our Church, is another Proof of her readiness to try and examine all things.

And thus, I hope, I have made it sufficiently appear, that the Church of England has, among others, the marks of a true Church; that she allows all and every Member in her Communion, to examine, prove, and try all things, and that she holds fast that which is good.

I shall now proceed to shew, that this Liberty of trying, and examining of all things, has not only been by many other Sects, or Churches in the World, which set up for Rivals or Adversaries to the Church of England, but that the Church of Rome, our great Competitor, is so far from allowing the Trial and Examination of things, that she neglects no Means or Powers to torse and suppress all Trial and Examination whatsoever. Everyone that knows any thing of the Papists, must confess that: in the Education of their Youth, they confine them to their own Method and Schemes of Learning, which are purposely contriv'd to weaken the Powers of Understanding and Reason, that their stupid Minds may be the more easily prepar'd to receive such monstrous Doctrines as are taught in their Church, and to be willing to believe and maintain them, without that strong Sense of the School, and those intolerable Mazes and Perplexities, which they have mix'd with Philosophy and Divinity, all purposely to make Learning odious, and at least so intricate, as that their own Absurdities might easily pass for admissibles. The holy Scriptures, which are the Rule of

Faith, and which they themselves would to
 be the *only Rule* till the *Council of Trent*, where
 they keep to themselves, and forbid the *Laiety*
 the use of *him*; whilst they mix so many
Legends and *Romantick Books* with the *Wri-*
tings of the Primitive Fathers; that the Pattern
 of the *antient Church* is quite lost, or at least
 rendered so obscure; that that pure uncorrupt
 State of the *Church* may serve as a Pattern
 for any the most corrupt *Church* upon *Earth*.
 Are not the *Accounts* which the *Church of*
Rome gives of her own *Articles* and *Doctrines*,
 partial and deficient? Are there not *Secrets*
 in her *Religion* which it is not thought conve-
 nient to communicate to the *unthinking Laiety*?
 And is she not no less partial in her *Accounts*
 of other *Churches*? Are not *Protestant Books*
 forbid her *People*? And such monstrous *Fa-*
bles invented and told of the *Reformed*, that
 their *Aversion* to us, (which ought to be
 founded on a *Disagreement of Principles*)
 is wrought up to a *Personal Antipathy*? The
 freedom of *Controversy* is intirely taken
 away; and the *Laiety* are under a necessity of
 giving no other reason for their *Faith*, but the
Faith of the Church. The from time to time,
 Great and learned Men have complain'd of
 the *Corruptions* of that *Church*, have argued,
 disputed, and died in that Cause, yet instead
 of *Reforming*, every change they have made
 has been for the worse; their last *Innovati-*
 ons

ons in the *Council of Tyne*, being more moderate than any of the former. As for their *Treatments* of other *Churches*, this is well known to be most *Unchristian* and *Inhumane*. They confer Salvation to their own *Part*, and look upon all without it as *Reprobates*, and in a *State of Damnation*. For which reason they spare never pardon those who go over to the *Protestants*, and will hardly receive them upon their return. Nay, there are many Instances of their having burnt several poor Wretches, even after they had publicly retracted what they call *Heresy*. In the Performance of their publick *Worship*, and the Institution of all their *Sacraments*, the *Laymen* intirely excluded from all their *just Rights*, which the *Primitive Church* allowed them. As for their *Synods* and *Councils*, they are so far from admitting a fair and impartial Enquiry after Truth, and Examination of Things, that they are wholly in a *Slavish Dependence* to a pretended *infallible Judge* at *Rome*, the *Pope*; and the *Bishops* and *Clergy*, who compose those *Assemblies*, are but the Instruments to execute and enforce his *Sovereign Will* and *Pleasure* upon the *Lay*. They have so little regard for *mutual Consistencies*, that they know not what the *Repression* means; but are so averse to all *Dissentions*, that they pursue with *Fire* and *Faggot* all those who in any point question their *Power*, or oppose

oppose their Innovations. Now by all these Instances does it not fully appear, that the *Papists* are so far from allowing a fair Trial of Things, or an Enquiry after Truth, that they on the other hand use all possible Endeavours to suppress and stifle it?

Secondly, Let us now enquire into the Conduct of the *Presbyterians* in these Points, and we shall find that they are not much behind the *Papists*, if we may be allow'd to make any Conjecture at their Proceedings, by what they did and profess'd when they were in Power, and by what they still Practice where they are in Possession of any *National Church*. In the Education of the *Lay*, they are extremely cautious and sparing, and whether it is because they are not overlearned themselves, or are at least willing to affect the want of Learning, they breed their Youth, generally speaking, to an Aversion for *Philosophy* and *sound Reasoning*; and in their room infill all the *Jargon* and *Cant* of their Party, more dangerous, and if possible, more obscure than that of the *Papists* and *School-men*; so that all their People are prepossessed and prejudiced to free and right thinking. No Persons indeed talk more of the *Scriptures* to their *Congregations* than they; but then they insist chiefly upon the mysterious and more obscure Parts of it; and in general, they choose rather to repeat, than explain. The *Fathers* and *Church*

Historians they wholly reject, and so deprive
 their *Liberty* of all other Patterns of a *Church* but
 themselves. It is seldom, or never, that they
 will disclose the *Articles of their Faith*, or let
 the *People* know what they believe and pro-
 fess; and when they do, the Account is so
 ambiguous and imperfect, that the *People*
 cannot frame any just Notion or Idea, of
 what they call their *Churches*. In their Accounts
 of other *Churches*, the *Presbyterians* are strange-
 ly uncharitable, apt to misrepresent them,
 and to bring against them a railing Accusation;
 calling themselves the only *Saints*, the only
Beloved and Elect of God. Their *Synods* and
Ecclesiastical Assemblies have carried the Inde-
 pendent Power much higher than the *Papists*,
 even to a plain Usurpation of Temporal Power;
 and in many Cases they have assumed Omni-
 science it self, and undertaken to judge of the
 Sincerity of the Heart. None make a great-
 er Clamour about Toleration than they do,
 when they are beholden to it; but where
 they are to give it, none profess a greater
 Aversion to it; witness the horrid *Anathemas*
 they pronounc'd against all they were pleas'd
 to stile *Dissenters*, when they were upper-
 most in the *Grand Rebellion*; How did they
 then declaim against the Sin of Separation?
 How black did they make it? Equalling it
 to the Crucifixion of our Saviour, since it was
 a tearing to pieces his mystical Body. As to
 all

all *Deserters* and *Forsakers of their Communion*, they are altogether implacable; and by many late and very common Instances, it plainly appears, that to go from one of their *Teachers* to another, has been accounted a *damnable Schism*.

Now by these Proofs, I think it is plain, that the *Presbyterians*, as well as the *Papists*, are far from allowing an *impartial Enquiry after Truth*, and a *free Trial and Examination of all Things*; and therefore cannot pretend to lay claim to that *mark of a true Church*, which is peculiar to the *Church of England*:

Thirdly, The *Independents*, notwithstanding their antient Enmity, do share with the *Presbyterians*, in many of the foregoing Severities: But suppose they did not, yet their very Constitution is at utter Defiance with a *fair Trial of Things*, and the Promotion of Truth. For where every *Congregation* is a *Church*, and all things belonging to that *Church*, are to be decided by a *Majority*, the *Wisdom and Knowledge of a Few* must be born down, and the *Ignorance and Folly of the Multitude* be establish'd into *Creeds and Articles*: Besides, what is *Truth* in one *Independent Congregation*, may be *Heresy* in another by this *Rule*; so that this *Religion* is a mere *Self-Contradiction*, and therefore at utter Enmity with *Free-thinking*, or an *impartial Enquiry after Truth*.

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Fourthly,

Fourthly, The *Quakers* come next ; and these are so far from approving the old regular and tedious Methods of acquiring Knowledge and Learning in Things sacred, whereby the Judgment may be qualified to discern aright, and to make a wise choice, that they have wholly thrown aside all Pretences to *humane Learning*, to make way for a shorter Method of attaining *divine Truths*. They have found out a nearer way, never discover'd before, by an immediate participation from what they call, *the Light, the Light within*. Through the help of this *Light* they pretend they stand in need of neither *Rule* nor *Pattern* to go by ; nor indeed of any other Helps for the attainment of *Truth*. Instead of *humane Learning*, the *Light* is their *Principle*, which the greatest Masters among them cannot conceive or understand, or give their Followers any Assurances, that they are moved and influenced by such a *Principle*. Mr. *Barclay* was the first of their Sect that ever pretended to give any fixt or intelligible Account of this *Light of the Quakers*, which he describes, as a *Substance* and not an *Accident* ; Born in every Man ; and yet containing the whole *Trinity, Father, Son, and holy Ghost*. Now I desire it may here be consider'd, how 'tis possible to conceive or understand this *Principle of the Quakers*, which makes as many *Gods* as there are
Men,

Men, and moreover, confines the *Godhead*, which is infinite and fills all things: Nay, it makes *the Light* a much greater *God* than the *Trinity* it self; for say they, *the Light contains the whole Trinity*. These are certainly such Absurdities, as no rational Creature, upon the common Notions of *natural Religion*, can believe or digest.

Therefore, for the *Quakers* to impose so false and foolish a Principle as this, instead of the common Principles of *humane Learning*, is a worse blind upon the People than even the *absolute Authority* of the *Romish Church*. There is no sort of *Enthusiasm*, but may be imposed upon the World in the very same way, where no extraordinary Effects can be produced to prove it to be from *Heaven*: There is not in this Case, the least Pretence of a *Miracle*. Are their *Preachers* free from the common Frailties of Nature in the exercise of their *Function*? From *Contradictions*, *Tautologies*, and *Absurdities*? And is it not easy for any ordinary Pretender to the gift of *speaking*, who owns himself to be influenc'd by no higher Power than what is purely *Humane*, to imitate and exceed the Talents of the most gifted amongst these *Enthusiasts*? Where such a Principle as this prevails, Men are no longer under the Dominion of their own *Reason*, but are mere *Tools* and *Machines*, actuated and set a going by mere *Whimsy* and
D 2 Nonfence ;

Nonsense : So that upon this Supposition, *Free-thinking* is not onely taken away, but the very use of it would be Sinful and Abominable. Hence it is, that when any Member of this *Sect* ventures to examine his *Faith* by the ordinary Rule of *right Reason*, and thereupon deserts his *Party*, the *Leaders* of the *Sect* are implacable; and upon their own Principles can never receive him again; For, say they, *He had his Day, his time of Visitation, which he has out-sinned; and after that, nothing remains, but a fearful Judgment and final Reprobation.* If at any time you demand from one of this silly Tribe, a reason of the *Faith* that is in him, you ask upon a Principle that he does not acknowledge; and therefore he presently works up himself into such a Ferment as proves the Descent of the *Light* into him, and he answers you in such prophetick, obscure Texts, or in such incoherent Terms of his own *Party*, as he neither will nor can explain, but by others, equally unintelligible; so that you can never bring the *Quarrels* to the form of an Argument, or to any the common Standards of *right Reason*. From all which, it is abundantly evident, how little regard this *Sect* pays to the Evidence of Reason, or the Enquiry after Truth.

The *Deists*, *Free-thinkers*, *Hobbiſts*, *Latitudinarians*, and *Libertines*, these all herd together, unite in the same Interest, and make
one

one entire Community ; and therefore I shall consider them in a body. They pretend to carry *Free-thinking* much higher than others do, and to make this the *distinguishing Mark* of their Party : But these Men by making the Authority of *Free-thinking* absolute and unlimited, do utterly destroy and confound it : For it is impossible to judge aright without a Rule to judge by ; and it is these Mens chief employ to represent all those as Slaves and Vassals, who subject themselves to any ; and yet none are more studious, or more at a loss than themselves, to find out one upon which to found their *Doctrines*. Sometimes they begin their *Scheme* with an *imaginary State of Nature*, that never did or could subsist in the World ; sometimes they would make *Nature* their onely God, and at other times resolve every thing into their great Principle *Matter*. It has often been debated amongst these Men, whether they should allow the same Credit to the *Scriptures*, as to other *antient Histories*, and *Pagan Writers*, or admit *Religion* as a *Moral or Political Scheme* ; for they will not allow it to be *Divine*. Nor are they less divided about the *Ends of living and acting* ; whether they should resolve all *humane Life* into *sensual or intellectual Pleasure*. So that for want of a *Rule*, and because they could never yet agree upon a *Set of Principles*, they leave their Followers in
perfect

perfect Ignorance, so that they cannot know them, or their Religion, what it is, or whether any, or which way to be of it, unless by this one general Maxim, *always to think as they please* : a State that debases human Nature below Brutes, who have the Rule of Instinct for the Guidance of their *Animal Life*. Endless Controversy that can never be determin'd for want of first Principles, is the direct Consequence of such a Persuasion. And this is so far from being an impartial Search after Truth, that it is Labour in vain ; for it is searching after that which can never be found, because by the Principle of this Profession, Men must always be searching, which is a questioning if not denying the very Being of Truth. And hence it appears, that these Men too, by allowing an absolute, unlimited, *Free-thinking*, do entirely confound and destroy it.

Now from this Parallel I have drawn, we may easily judge how much the Church of England has the advantage over all the other Churches and Sects, that set up to rival her in her Candor and Clemency, by encouraging *Free-thinking*, in the most diligent and impartial search after Truth : And this must for ever Silence, and render inexcusable, all our Dissenters and Domestick Hereticks, who found their Departure from our Establish'd Church upon this very Principle

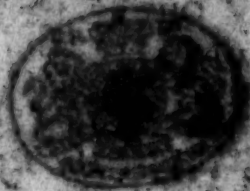
ple of *Free-thinking*; and yet when they have left our *Communion*, are more against *Free-thinking*, than the very *Church* from whose *Communion* they divide themselves.

This Consideration therefore, of the Regard the *Church of England* has for *Free-thinking*, should, one would think, if duly weigh'd, be sufficient to preserve the unity of her *Communion*, and restore all those lapsed Members who *dissent* and go out from her. To what other *Church* can they resort, where they can enjoy their own Reason more freely, so far as that Freedom conduces to the Advancement of *Truth*? And after this, what other Reason can any Man give for departing from so impartial, and so well constituted a *Church*, but onely to enjoy the freedom of *being in the wrong*, and the hazard of entertaining many *destructive and pernicious Errors*?

Whilst Men retain the *Rule* and the *Pattern*; (and it is as much their Interest and Glory to retain these, as it is the Interest and Glory of any other Order of Creatures to keep within the bounds which their Creator has set them) and whilst they value the use of their *own Reason*, and would preserve it clear and impartial, they ought stedfastly to adhere to that *Church* where this *Reason* is most improveable, and the *Rule* and the *Pattern* preserv'd in the greatest *Purity*. How
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can Men choose to separate from such a Church, unless they believe that Unity is a Publick Evil, and Destructive of the Rights of humane Nature.

To conclude, There is nothing more wanting to reconcile all Men to the Church of England, but thoroughly to know and understand how Pure, how Perfect, and how Truly Christian she is; how great a Friend to the better and incorrupt Part of humane Nature, and how agreeable to the strict Principles of right Reason. If the pure genuine Rule of holy Scriptures, if the true primitive Pattern of the Apostles and their Successors, and the best improved Reason of Mankind, be sufficient to arm a Church with Authority, the Church of England, which is so industrious to preserve all these in their greatest Perfection, has the best Title to be of any Church in the World; and therefore all her Members, out of Gratitude to so kind a Mother, ought to employ all their Powers in defence of her Rights, and in vindication of her Dignity; and heartily pray, that her Dominion may be from the One Sea to the Other, and from the Flood unto the World's End; and so become the Joy of the whole Earth. Amen.



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